

Testimony of Scott Swartz, Associate Program Manager
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Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed Midterm Budget Adjustments

Please, do not support Governor Malloy's plan to eliminate Family Empowerment and Family School Connection Programs. My name is Scott Swartz, Associate Program Manager of the Fatherhood Initiative at Madonna Place, Inc., a family support agency in Norwich. The desired result of our services is that children in New London County will develop in safe and nurturing families.

The Family Empowerment Program (FEP) helps support the work I do with young fathers under 23 years old. This program works in a prevention manner to teach young fathers how to care for and nurture their new born children. We use the curriculum "Dr. Dad" from the National Fatherhood Initiative. This curriculum covers how to care for a sick, injured, and healthy child as well as how to ensure a safe home for an infant. This course also has a component on the prevention of shaken baby syndrome. Conclusive research evidence shows that fathers are critical to the health and wellness of children, especially infants. For example, a study from 1990 showed that fathers participating in prenatal activities were associated with higher birth weights.

Usually when we first meet a young father who is interested in our program, he is searching to understand his role as a dad. Most men in this age range were still considered children themselves recently and tend to be self-centered. The notion of putting someone else's needs first can be quite foreign for young adults. In addition to teaching these men hands on child rearing tools and concepts, we also help them realize a new identity and perspective as dads. When given these new tools and given an opportunity to share with other fathers, these young dads usually thrive and embrace fatherhood. They are enthusiastic to share and ask questions.

The FEP program has a proven record of effectively engaging young fathers in supportive services at two critical points, prenatally and soon after the birth of a child. The program not only helps them learn parenting skills, it conducts case management to help fathers establish paternity, custody orders, co-parenting plans, and financial support agreements. We exceeded our contractual obligations of serving 25 in group and 20 in case management for the last six years. We averaged 35 served per year over the last five years. For 2011, our program served 36 unduplicated fathers. The majority of them utilized both group and case management services. Given our success we will continue with all Family Empowerment Program services as usual during the next year.

Please, understand that cutting essential programs that support parents and children is not a wise decision. Many of our neighbors are facing hard times and turn to community programs for support. Our agency is inundated with families in need. Having the state's full support to work with young fathers is a necessity for the greater good of the community. CT has wisely invested in FEP programs and the bottom line cost is not expensive. **This is not the time to eliminate programming for CT's underserved and vulnerable populations, young fathers and their children.**

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